

Writing Facts

A Short Introduction

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Everybody is talking about facts. They are not only a fixture in research and in law. Facts are increasingly becoming a major topic in politics, the (social) media, and everyday life. This produces certain linguistic formations that often contradict established meanings of the notion. The embarrassing creation of “alternative facts”¹ is just one example of such paradoxical constructions targeting at open replacements of the understanding of truth. It is opinions and affects, hearsay, algorithms, and outright lies expressed by populist leaders and self-marketing influencers that can stand for truth. Since the Trump era, the Brexit narratives and, of course, the Corona pandemic a blunt blurring of borders between lies, fiction, and facts is well underway in new forms. As a reaction, critical voices in research, journalism, and the arts often reinvent old dichotomies and antagonisms such as fact in the sense of truth or reality as an opposition to fake, lies, and fiction.² This often leads to initiatives

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- 1 Kellyanne Conway, senior advisor of President Donald Trump, in an interview with NBC on January 21, 2017. Cf. <https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/video/conway-press-secretary-gave-alternative-facts-860142147643> (02.03.2022). In Austria and Germany, “alternative Fakten” was elected as the “Unwort des Jahres” (non-word of the year). In 2016, *The Oxford Dictionary* chose “post-truth” for the international word of the year while the Gesellschaft für Deutsche Sprache opted for “post-faktisch.” (Cf. van Dyk 2017: 348)
 - 2 Philipp Sarasin defines the lie as a tool of power and as a prerogative of interpretation. (Cf. Sarasin in this volume and 2016) Silke van Dyk explains the new situation by pointing to the need of new critical perspectives able to deal adequately with today's situation of post-truth and the idea of an alternative reality aimed against the values of morality and education, critique, and research. (Cf. van Dyk 2017: 353) Both Sarasin and van Dyk reject the interpretation that the era of post-truth would be the result of postmodernism and poststructuralism. Instead of turning back to a positivist realism, sociologists, and historians like van Dyk or Sarasin stress the multidimensionality of

of fact checking in articles, accounts, interviews, research, and predictions and serves as a procedure of falsifications mostly targeted at misinformation and deception. The prestigious Parisian university Science Po for instance launched an initiative called *De Facto*³, and nearly all serious newspapers have installed a fact checking section, while internet platforms and blogs are concerned with finding the truth (for instance, <https://www.politifact.com>). To strengthen their concerns and objectives, both the populist discourses and the initiatives of critique stress a reference to and concern about facts. The critical voices do so because of the relevance of the question of fact and non-fact today, while populist discourses wish to construct a system of post-truth and post-factual.⁴

It is the task of the present volume to take up current discussions and controversies while bearing in mind that the notion of fact never did have a fixed meaning or allowed just one approach. Since its modern beginnings in the 17th century, 'fact' is a highly complex notion that touches many of the most challenging questions in modernity. It concerns the systems of knowledge and arts as well as social, legal, and political institutions. As such, fact depends on everchanging epistemological discourses, multifaceted institutional functions, and interests while also encompassing questions of authentication and authority, individual standpoints as well as political and social dimensions. 'Fact' is further based on diverse and manifold formats, tools, and media. This collection of essays approaches the complex of 'fact' by taking into consideration its multidimensional applications, forms, and functions. An encompassing and constitutive feature of the concept was chosen by addressing the practices and formats of writing. Such a focus allows to lay bare and analyze the fact's dependence of practices of media, tools, instruments, formats, and specific modes of handling. As a notion that partakes in epistemological questions, in paradigms and models of the sciences and philosophy, of law, history and the arts, 'fact' underlies multiple practices that are supposed to translate and transform data, situations, events, things, objects, or human beings into what, from specific points of view and within

facts by emphasizing the ethical component of such an approach. With reference to Foucault, Silke van Dyk observes the invention of a new "Wahrheitsspiel" today. (Ibid.: 355) Sarasin for his part demands for "Redlichkeit" (integrity) which he sees realized when proper standpoints, theories, and sources are laid bare. See also Gess 2021.

3 Cf. <https://www.sciencespo.fr/fr/actualites/actualite%20a%20decouvrez-de-facto-un-outil-inedit-au-service-d-une-information-de-qualite/6996> (03.03.2022).

4 Cf. van Dyk 2017: 348.

specific discourses, is called a fact. Numbers, diagrams, geometric figures, mathematical formulas, language, visual and auditive instruments are some of the applied tools and media. Often overlooked in this context is the relevance and effectivity of the practice of writing in different fields. Therefore, a major task of this volume is to look at the practice of writing in various discursive and institutional settings by also considering the formats accompanying it. It is not intended, however, to come up with a final definition or an all-over valid description of 'fact.' Even if a realist approach is most popular in common dictionaries, this volume does not favor a particular standpoint but rather confronts the notion in its complexity and multidimensionality. Of course, a realist point of view allows for a certain obviousness concerning the notion's constituents. An example: "A thing that has really occurred or is actually the case; a thing certainly known to be a real occurrence or to represent the truth. Hence a particular truth known by actual observation or authentic testimony, as opposed to an inference, a conjecture, or a fiction; a datum of experience, as distinguished from conclusions that may be based on it."⁵ The *Oxford English Dictionary* further proclaims facts as "[t]hat which is known (or firmly believed) to be real or true; what has actually happened or is the case; truth attested by direct observation or authentic testimony; reality."⁶ The *Online Etymology Dictionary* states that the understanding of 'fact' as a "real state of things (as distinguished from a statement or belief)"⁷ is from the 1630s. A second look discloses a couple of challenging aspects. Neither of the described components such as reality, truth, and objectivity, nor referents like events, people and executed works are universally agreeable. Since the beginning of the modern fact in the 16th and 17th centuries, the question why and by whom and in which mode something is considered a fact, provokes many different answers and ever new questions alike. As such, the question of fact allows a view to modernity that embraces its institutions, discourses, artifacts, tools, instruments, media, and practices alike. It also highlights specific focuses in scientific disciplines and further helps us to understand theoretical and methodological models of philosophy concerning the interrelation of individuals, things, and media. Finally, the observation of different uses and

5 "fact", in: *OED Online*, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/67478?rskey=zH7ZgP&result=1> (21.03.2022).

6 Ibid.

7 "fact", in: *Online Etymology Dictionary*, https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=fact#etymonline_v_1064 (11.03.2022).

functions of ‘facts’ opens up a comparative view on systems and discourses of the sciences, the arts, politics, society, and everyday life. In the following, I will outline a couple of historically and systematically interesting aspects of ‘fact’ together with some of the theoretical and methodological challenges accompanying it.

Some Historical and Systematic Observations

No doubt, the idea of ‘fact’ is one of the most influential and crucial inventions of modern times. It regulates the laws of private action and communication as well as rules for public performances and patterns of behavior. Thus, the idea of fact concerns moral and ethical codes. As such, it takes part in semantic fields like truth, honor, decency, and correctness. Not to lie and to be honest is one of the oldest moral and religious precepts of Western culture. Current discussions show that such moral components are still at issue today. This is not only the case in critical discourses against the post-factual but also common within the new regimes of post-truth where ‘facts’ are the result of open lies. A look at the conceptual history and etymological aspects of fact provides an initial clue as to when the modern notion came into the picture and why it involves relevant questions concerning epistemology and knowledge that are still valid today.

There is consensus that with the wave of modern secularization in the 17th and 18th centuries, which went hand in hand with the rise of the idea of a subject dependent of a standpoint and that of a given real world in tension between objectivity and contingency, the question of fact became fundamental for systems of knowledge, epistemology, and modern law. However, to write a history of the notion of fact is no easy task. Jocelyn Holland states that it is quite impossible “to follow the manifold branches of the fact’s genealogy, or to narrate even one of its many histories.”⁸ Nevertheless, we can observe that the English word ‘fact’ as well as the German use of the Latin ‘factum’ and its later equivalent ‘Tatsache’ have a strong legal basis going back to the Early Modern Age. The *Centre national de Ressources Textuelle et Lexicales* defines “fact” as a material act of a person and an event with juridical effects.⁹ In *Das*

8 Holland 2016 : 34.

9 “Tout acte matériel d’une personne, tout événement extérieur pouvant avoir un effet juridique.” A fact is also an infraction, a crime, and the result of an effective act (“In-

Etymologische Wörterbuch des Deutschen one learns that during the 16th century “Faktum” and “Tatsache, beglaubigtes Ereignis” were integrated into the legal discourse (also in the sense of crime), during the 18th century as an authenticated event, while in the 19th century, “faktisch” – probably coming from the English word “fact” – meant “being real, in reality.”¹⁰ The German language, just like legal discourses, generally differentiates between a real event and a legally relevant fact, i.e., “*de facto* ‘tatsächlich, in Wirklichkeit’ as opposed to *de iure* ‘dem Recht entsprechend.’”¹¹

However, there is also a theological and philosophical content in “factum,” “fact,” “fait” and “Tatsache” referring to *res facti*. As for instance, it is discussed as to whether “Tatsachen” (based on the English equivalent “matter of fact”) – in the sense of real events – can form the basis for theological questions.¹² Until the 18th century, the Latin notion of “factum” was widely distributed in French and most prevalent in German.¹³ In the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, the Grimm brothers quote Lessing, Fichte, Wieland, Kant, Pestalozzi, Goethe among others by stating that “Thatsache” is still rare and quite unknown in its meaning but already allover and steadily used.¹⁴ By this time

fraction, délit, crime résultant d'un acte effectif positif”). Cf. “fait”, in : *Centre national de Ressources Textuelle et Lexicales*, <https://cnrtl.fr/definition/fait> (04.03.2022). The *Online Etymology Dictionary* observes that “fact” is a crime, an occurrence, a deed, a condition, a thing done and in the more modern sense of a thing known to be true (around 1630). Cf. “fact”, in: *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=fact> (11.03.2022).

10 Pfeifer 1995: 319.

11 Ibid. in German: “Im 16. Jh. wird lat. factum ‘Tat, Handlung’ in die dt. Rechtssprache übernommen (auch in der Bedeutung ‘Delikt’) und seit dem 18. Jh. als ‘Tatsache, beglaubigtes Ereignis’ allgemein geläufig. Fakt m. gleichbed. mit Faktum, im 19. Jh. üblich; Einfluß von engl. fact ist möglich. faktisch Adj. ‘tatsächlich, wirklich’ (Ende 18. Jh.), meist adverbial gebraucht und schon im 19. Jh. häufig nur verstärkend. *de facto* ‘tatsächlich, in Wirklichkeit’, Übernahme des 16. Jhs. aus der lat. Juristensprache (Gegensatz zu *de iure* ‘dem Recht entsprechend’).”

12 Cf. Gabriel 2004 : 209.

13 Cf. “factum”, in : *Trésor de la langue française*, <http://atilf.atilf.fr/tlf.htm> (03.03.2022).

14 Cf. “Thatsache”, in: *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm. Digital Version of the Trier Center for Digital Humanities* 01/21, <https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=T02891> (23.02.2022): “‘Das wörtlein thatsache ist noch so jung. ich weisz mich der zeit ganz wohl zu erinnern, da es noch in niemands munde war. aber aus wessen munde oder feder es zuerst gekommen, das weisz ich nicht (nach HEYNATZ 2, 467 hat zuerst J. J. SPALDING in der übersetzung eines Buttlerschen werkes vom j. 1756 das wort thatsache für *res facti*, nicht gerade für *factum* gebraucht). noch weniger weisz ich, wie

dominant is the meaning of a real event, an objectively given or a thing or idea or content confirmed by ratio or perception.¹⁵ The article in Zedler's encyclopedia at the beginning of the 18th century still favors "factum" in all its combinations. However, just a couple of years later the more broadly used "Tatsache" superseded "factum."¹⁶ During the 18th century, a modern notion of fact became predominant. It was Kant who initiated what analytical philosophy and logic would later maintain, namely that "Tatsache" not only had the quality of a real event but also that of the knowledgeable ("Wißbares").¹⁷ As a result, during the 18th and 19th centuries, science, philosophy and the arts alike were ridden by the question as to whether facts should be handled as part of a given reality/nature, or if they were only given when perceived and represented through the creative process of a subject.¹⁸ Both positions are equally present in the sciences as well as in the arts, but both approaches also lead to ever greater abstractions. This is the case in the scientific and epistemological

es gekommen sein mag, dasz dieses neue wörtlein ganz wider das gewöhnliche schick-sal neuer wörter in kurzer zeit ein so gewaltiges glück gemacht hat; noch, wodurch es eine so allgemeine aufnahme verdient hat, da man in gewissen schriften kein blatt umschlagen kann, ohne auf eine thatsache zu stoszen' LESSING 11, 645." In English: "The word fact is still so young. I can remember the time quite well when it was not yet on anyone's lips. But from whose mouth or pen it came first, I don't know (according to HEYNATZ 2, 467, J. J. SPALDING first used the word fact for res facti, not exactly for factum, in the translation of a work by Buttler from 1756). I know even less how it came about that this new little word, completely contrary to the usual fate of new words, has made such a tremendous fortune in a short time; nor, through which it has earned such a general reception, since one cannot turn a page in certain writings without encountering a fact.' 11, 645." (Transl. S.K.)

15 Cf. *ibid.*: "[...] eine vorgefallene, wirklich geschehene sache, etwas feststehendes, das nicht bezweifelt werden kann: ein aufrichtiger wahrheitsforscher von thatsachen. STURZ 1, 140 (vom j. 1768) [...] gegenstände für begriffe, deren objective realität es sei durch reine vernunft oder durch erfahrung bewiesen werden kann, sind thatsachen (z. b. die mathematischen eigenschaften der grössen). KANT 7, 356 und anm. (vom j. 1790)." In English: "[...] a thing that has really happened, something established that cannot be doubted: a sincere truth seeker of facts. STURZ 1, 140 (dated 1768) [...] objects for concepts whose objective reality can be proved through pure reason or through experience are facts (e.g., the mathematical properties of quantities). Kant 7, 356 and note (dated 1790)." (Transl. S.K.)

16 Cf. "factum", in: Zedler 1735.

17 Cf. Gabriel 2004: 209.

18 Cf. Leitner 2016b: 11.

model of positivism, in the format of proposition and mathematical formulas in logic and rational statistics. By the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, ‘fact’ could not only mean a real event/state/object but more and more denominate the result of a process of logic and media that had to be formatted in abstraction. As such, ‘fact’ represented a concept in the sense of truth. Frege and others have stressed the abstraction of fact to “ein Gedanke, der wahr ist.”¹⁹ Up to now, the question of fact was discussed in those terms of truth: “A fact is, traditionally, the worldly correlate of a true proposition, a state of affairs whose obtaining makes that proposition true.”²⁰ It is also proposed in linguistic terms of communication and true information.²¹

Of relevance for the German situation is that “Tatsache” or “Sachverhalt” remained a legal term, while the foreign word “Fakt” became the dominant notion in the sciences and in current popular discourses.²² The *Centre national de Ressources Textuelle et Lexicales* quotes “fact” in the context of the sciences as something given and as the result of observation and experience – “Toute donnée de l’expérience, observée ou observable, directement ou indirectement (p. oppos. aux hypothèses, aux théories).”²³ The issue here concerns a popular dichotomy from the 19th century, namely fact vs. theory. Such a “fact” can be augmented into “fait brut” which is the result of a direct observation. A “fait scientifique” would be an objectivated phenomenon interpreted by cognition/*esprit* and introduced into a general law: “Phénomène objectivé (car

19 Gabriel 2004: 209–210.

20 Lowe 2005: 267; also quoted in Ryan 2020: 79. See also the article “fact” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* which gives a proper insight into such formats and approaches. (Cf. Mulligan/Correia 2021)

21 Fludernik/Ryan 2020b : 2–4.

22 Cf. Pfeifer 1995 : 316.

23 “fait”, in : *Centre national de Ressources Textuelle et Lexicales*, <https://cnrtl.fr/definition/fait> (04.03.2022). Cf. in ibid. an example from the 19th century: “Ce quelque chose, qui constitue l’essence même de la recherche expérimentale, c’est le fait. Établir une expérience, c’est déterminer un ou plusieurs faits, rien de plus. La science a été sur la voie de sa prospérité du jour où les savants ont eu le culte, la passion exclusive du fait et rien que du fait. BOURGET, *Essais psychol. contemp.*, 1883, p. 169.” In English: “That which constitutes the very essence of experimental research, is the fact. To establish an experiment is to determine one or more facts, nothing more. Science has been on the way to its prosperity from the day when scholars had the cult, the exclusive passion for the fact and nothing but the fact.” (Transl. S.K.)

apparaissant régulièrement dans certaines conditions), interprété par l'esprit et rapporté à une loi générale."²⁴

The latter example and the legal semantics around 'fact' in general show that the notion contains the semantic aspect of a process underlying a doing and proceeding. This goes back to the Latin roots of *facere* in the sense of "doing" and "making." Like the English "fact," definitions of the German "factum" and "Tatsache" embrace doing or making, which is still the case also in English ("action, deed, process of making"), French ("action"), and Italian ("atto, opera, azione, operazione").²⁵ At the same time, facts are the *result* of such a process and making.²⁶ This leads to the question of the relation between the process of finding and constructing facts and that of the status and function of the result, and further, the question of the kind of procedures as well as the ontological status and moral/institutional value/function of 'fact.'

Based on these considerations and the etymology of 'fact,' the notion in its current understandings is the result of at least four major discourses of modernity:

- 1) modern law with its norms and institutional settings (judges, advocates, case-finding, court rulings etc.), which follows the task to create data into legal facts (since the 15th century),
- 2) modern epistemology with its new concepts of reality based on the invention of a modern subject that perceives and observes (starting in the 17th century),
- 3) modern science with its models of objectivity and secular universal truth (19th century). Only the latter provoke the whole meanings of fact that are in use today. The basis of such facts are entities or data that have very concrete contours (things, events, actions, deeds, persons, etc.), while for their part they result from the processing of such data via actions and procedures like abstractions, processes of authentications, formats, and practices. Nevertheless, an event only becomes a fact if someone declares it as such.
- 4) Hence, and this has been an issue since the late 19th century, facts are understood as dependent on media, formats, and practices, changing epistemologies and concepts of reality. In that respect, Nietzsche

24 Ibid.

25 Cf. *The Oxford English Dictionary*; *Le Grand Robert*; "fatto", in: Battaglia 1972: 727–734.

26 Cf. Knaller 2010: 188.

mainly comes to mind, but Ludwik Fleck's *Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache* (1935) could also serve as an example.²⁷ Consequently, from then on, the process of making facts could be thought of as exposed to constant changes and everchanging results.

Possible Approaches Today

Departing from the described interrelations of 'fact' (empirical realities and assertions based on media, formats, and practices) laid out in the term, I would like to outline five approaches that are possible today:

- 1) The first is the understanding of fact as a correlate to true propositions, meaning a fact is true because of a cognitive and medial act based on language or formulae. This is a task pursued by analytical philosophy and logic.²⁸
- 2) Another approach to fact departs from a metalevel to view the disciplinary challenges and institutional interrelations concerning fact. The relationships between the systems of knowledge and the arts are often at the center of interest. Discussing 'fact' allows to understand the tasks and challenges of both the sciences and the arts, as Christine Lehlleitner shows in her collection of essays *Fact and Fiction. Literary and Scientific cultures in Germany and Britain*²⁹, where authors discuss different positions of literature in relation to the sciences and academic disciplines. The publication by Daniel Fulda and Thomas Prüfer, *Faktenglauben und fiktionales Wissen*, is another example.³⁰ Closely related to such approaches are publications that consider specific contents and formats in the context of fact and literature. Monika Fludernik and Marie-Laure Ryan, for example, give a profound insight into narrative modes in the context of facts in different fields and disciplines.³¹

27 Cf. Nietzsche 1999 [1873]; Fleck 1980 [1935].

28 Cf. Mulligan/Correia 2021; Lowe 2005: 267; Goodman 1965.

29 Lehlleitner 2016a.

30 Fulda/Prüfer 1996.

31 Fludernik/Ryan 2020a; also: Holland 2016; Lavocat 2016; Fludernik/Falkenhayner/Steiner 2015; Skalin 2005; Lounsberry 1990; Genette 1990.

- 3) A third possibility would be to approach 'fact' from a historical point of view by stressing epistemological questions as well as those concerning the history of philosophy and science. Lorraine Daston's works are highlights in that regard. A recent study by Mary Poovey deals with institutional models and formats besides epistemological questions.³²
- 4) A fourth one would be to understand both as real and material, i.e., the empirical event or matter to be proven, as well as the medial act and its outcomes. That would mean, for instance, that the event of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo is a fact just as the act of writing about it has the quality of fact, together with all its related processes and institutions involved (archives, writing processes etc.) and the produced texts (e.g., narration, chronicle). As soon as a scientist, philosopher or author starts writing about an event, they also produce events/facts within a fact-finding process.³³ As such, facts constitute several levels of data and dimensions of reality. Science studies and network theories pursue that path when considering science and knowledge as the result of a doing and saying. Facts build a conglomerate of theories, methods as well as processes of authentication and practices.³⁴ The etymological observations above show that such an approach is implied in the term itself.
- 5) The latter approach leads to the fifth one, which primarily considers the multidimensional profile of facts by pointing to the everchanging constituents and discourses of facts. This sparks a discussion on the challenges of 'fact' today as described at the beginning. The discussions of Philipp Sarasin, Silke van Dyk and Nicola Gess³⁵ are examples of a critical discussion on current confrontations between realist objectivists, critical-Foucauldian and populist-manipulating discourses in the context of fact or non-fact. Taking into account the above-mentioned approaches, the volume addresses the question of fact by considering this multidimensionality and historicity, which allows a closer look at modernity and its systems of knowledge and the arts with its institutions, tools, and practices.

32 Daston/Galison 2007; Daston 1998; Poovey 1998.

33 Cf. Knaller 2010: 188.

34 Cf. Stern 2020: 399.

35 Gess 2021; van Dyk 2017; Sarasin 2016.

Writing Facts/Writing Facts

The described interrelations of fact (empirical realities and assertions based on media, formats, and practices) allow me to come back to the topic of writing, which touches pragmatic, semantic, and conceptual dimensions, preparatory procedures as well as formal choices, models of argumentation and narrative patterns, and, of course, the result – texts/writings. Thus, the present volume considers both perspectives in this context – the *writing* of facts as well as the writing of *facts*. A look at writing as part of the fact-finding procedure as well as of dealing with what is considered facts, shows that the concept is the outcome of institutional and lifeworld practices and subject to formal and modal strategies. Questions of writing³⁶ concern the entire process, and thus, that which remains inseparable from productive (real-life) actions and practices.³⁷ They also consider the formats and styles of certain approaches and groups. In the context of writing as practice, Roland Barthes is a useful point of reference.³⁸ He addresses the physical, corporeal elements of writing and of using writing utensils, thus setting himself apart from a purely metaphorical notion of writing (in the sense of style or a particular kind of form and work). Particularly Barthes's concept of "*écriture*"³⁹ has become prevalent in the study of writing processes.⁴⁰ Rüdiger Campe's "Schreibszone" model (1991), which he developed for literary studies, builds on the notion of Barthes's *écriture*.⁴¹ In his study on writing processes, Martin Stingelin for his part takes up this notion and differentiates between

36 Besides Barthes's *écriture*, Kittler's 'Aufschreibesysteme' (cf. Kittler 1985) can be quoted as a precursor; regarding the notion of 'process,' the *critique généalogique* (Grésillon 2012, 1999; Hay 1984) has brought forth some findings. The researchers involved in Martin Stingelin's project "Zur Genealogie des Schreibens" ("On the Genealogy of Writing"), however, put an even stronger focus on the nexus between writing and life (or writing as life) than the other models. Besides the text itself, this processual element also incorporates the (biographical, institutional, technical/material and poetological) conditions under which a text is produced. (Cf. Zanetti 2012a, 2012b; Stingelin 2012, 2004)

37 Cf. Giuriato/Stingelin/Zanetti 2004.

38 Cf. Barthes 1984b.

39 Cf. Barthes 1984b: 344–345; also: Barthes 1984a.

40 Cf. Knaller 2017; Stingelin 2004: 13; Campe 1991: 759; also: Brink/Sollte-Gresser 2004: 18–19.

41 Cf. Campe 1991: 759.

“Schreibszene” and “Schreib-Szene.” The latter thematizes and problematizes, within the text, the ensemble of the ‘Schreibszene’ by revealing its heterogeneity and non-stability.⁴² As for Stingelin, the ensemble of the “Schreibszene” consists of language (semantics of writing), instrumentality (technology of writing), gesture (physical dimension), frames, the distribution of roles, and directing. Gesture/physical dimension, the distribution of roles, and directing can be linked to emotion paradigms, i.e., those discursive and psychophysical traces left at the very moment of productive and receptive activity.

A look at writing as a practice allows to extend ‘fact’ beyond a theoretical and abstract concept and to understand it as part of a practice on several levels: As a psychophysical process, writing relates to self- and other-experiences, emotions, judgments, evaluations, understanding, and perception; as a cultural practice, it is tied to respective media, techniques, modes, rules of the field and societal norms; as an aesthetic practice, it is determined by respective models and its own aesthetic/creative impulses; finally, as a lifeworld practice, writing ultimately depends on environmental and economic conditions as well as on communication models.⁴³ “Writing facts” must therefore be perceived not only as a concrete process linked to verbal and textual media but also as a process that allows us to observe the epistemological, theoretical, and practical impact of dealing with and naming facts in systems, discourses, and everyday life.

Sections of the Volume

This volume is based on a symposium held at the Centre for Cultural Studies at the University of Graz in November 2021. The event was the result of a co-operation between the European PhDnet “Literary and Cultural Studies,” the University of Giessen and the doctoral program “Culture-Text-(Act)ion” coordinated at the Centre for Cultural Studies. Scholars from different disciplines participated in the conference with lectures and discussions on writing facts. The proposed interdisciplinary approach of the symposium also forms the foundation for the present collection of essays. As such, the volume considers the multidimensional applications, forms, and functions of the notion of ‘fact’

42 Cf. Stingelin 2004: 15.

43 Cf. Knaller 2022: 91–102.

and is therefore divided into several sections that touch on multiple themes, thereby allowing plural disciplinary and discursive perspectives on 'fact.' The first section "Theory and History" includes a historical overview of the notion and a theoretical/methodological proposal of how to deal with questions of fact today (Knaller), further a profound discussion of the role of writing as one of the most powerful ways of cultural fact- and worldmaking (Nünning) and finally, the questioning of discourses of fact and its challenges to current political, epistemological, and public constellations. (Sarasin) The contributions of the second section "Writing Society, Politics, and Law" present possible confrontations of 'fact' within these contexts and discourses. They consider the importance of the notion for modern concepts in the social and political sciences (Müller), the function of the act of writing for fascist and authoritarian concepts (von Roedern) and the specific role and constitution of legal and non-legal facts within the law and its norms (Albrecht/Ibing). A third section ("Literature and Art") deals with questions of the factual in their importance for literature and art during the 18th and 19th centuries by confronting colonial concepts with an early postcolonial fact-writing (Brandt) and by investigating some 19th century realist approaches (Wolf). Fact-writing during the 20th and 21st centuries is exemplified through discussions on writing gender/masculinity in literature and popular essays in Germany and Italy (Schöffberger). Furthermore, through an analysis of writing the tragedy of the extinction of animals in the era of the Anthropocene (Simonis) and by engaging with new documentarist and literary approaches that question traditional concepts of history (writing) (Voithofer, Martinez). Since dealing with fictive and fictional writings and text formations, the relation between fact/reality/history and fiction/fictional is a persistent topic in these essays. At the same time, it is questioned and brought up for discussion as to whether such a confrontation necessarily leads to dichotomies and oppositions. The last section ("Media and Writing Practice") analyzes the way in which medial aspects play a role within discourses and practices around 'fact.' This includes an insight into specific formats of representing and conceptualizing dance, i.e., bodily and emotional movements into writing (Rieger), an analysis of approaches of early modern journalism and its writing practices at the beginning of the 20th century (Huber) and of how social media and the internet produce 'digital facts,' also considering their particular impact on young adults (Höfler). The last contribution turns to the important aspect of writing practices and discusses ways of creating facts through writing in an academic

context by looking at the questions coming with it for early stage students and instructors alike (Pany-Habsa).

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